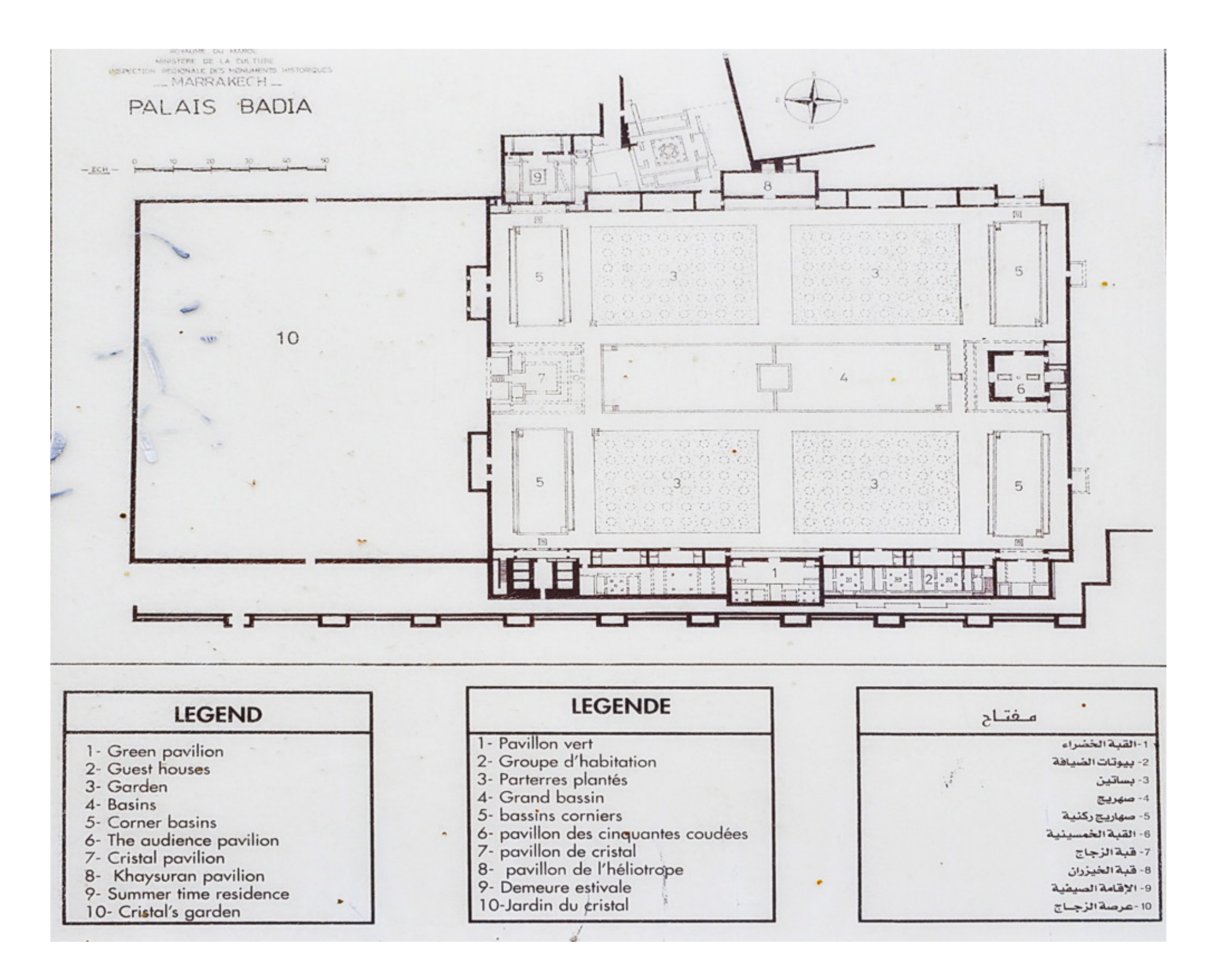
The splendor of El Badi Palace in Marrakech

by

Brian A. Smith, D.C.

In 1641, the Dutch artist Adriaen Matham visited Marrakesh and wrote a poetic ode whose language seems, in places, to equal that of al-Fishtl. For example:

Your magnificent palace surpasses
in splendor and in sumptuousness all the royal courts!
Your orchard of Meserra is richly planted
With agreeable trees of one type or another,
Of oranges, of lemons, and other fruit without count,
Of olives and dates; it is a garden filled with delicacies.
One finds there the most pure water that one has ever seen
And all the embellishments it is possible to have in this world.
It is deplorable that the eyes of barbarians
And not those of Christians always witness this spectacle.
But everything that man constructs will collapse,
Struck by death, trampled by feet and miserably wounded,
According to what is predicted for all kingdoms.
No other royal palace can ever compare with you,
Nevertheless, O city, you will one day be totally destroyed
And you will resemble a field for sheep.



Layout of the Palace

El Badi has recently been undergoing a re-evaluation of its splendor and significance in the Islamic world and the world-at-large and has gone from being a forgotten and unknown royal residence to being one of the greatest palaces ever built. Construction began in 1578 and was completed, more-or-less, sixteen years later. It was built by and for the greatest of the al-Hasani sheiks to rule Morocco - al-Mansur. This was the true *Golden Age* of that country – the empires' border encompassed more than four times the size the nation is today and it was perhaps the wealthiest nation in the world. The Palace measured 443′ x 361′ (135 x 110 m); for comparison a US football field measures 360′ x 100′; the palce could hold four! The main courtyard had four sunken gardens of 33′ x 98′ (10 x 30 m) each being separated - 2 from 2 - by a reflecting pool that was 295′ x 66′ (90 x 20 m). On each side of the courtyard were two pavilions, one being 49′ x 53′ (15 x 16 m) and the other 49′ x 76′ (15 x 23 m), which acted as reception rooms for dignitaries and guests.



Virtual reconstructions



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Palace ruins showing a small fountain in the courtyard with detail of the intricate tile patterns used for the virtual reconstruction. The walls of the buildings were faced in marble imported from Italy which had the finest silk hangings along the entire wall. White marble with thin black grout lines was used on the heated or cooled floors, depending on the time of year. The side pavilions were fronted by an arcade of marble columns with gold cornices, draped with silk curtains with seating platforms covered with the finest cushions and pillows.



Detail of the tile floor patterns in the ruins of the palace.



Stephen Cory, James E. Lindsay and John Armajani. "The Forgotten Palace: Morocco's al-Badi' as a Symbol of Caliphal Splendor " *Historical Dimensions of Islam: Pre-Modern and Modern Periods - Essays in Honor of R. Stephan Humphreys* (2009) 119-150; citing Henry de Castries, "Le Palais d'El Bedi et L'Oeuvre de Matham," *Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc*, Pays-Bas, IV (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1923), 579.